



## Playgroups: A promising approach for vulnerable young children in Rwanda

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Playgroups as part of a Model for Resiliency

Context & Rationale

Methodology

Research Methods

Key Findings

Recommendations

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OUTLINE

# Playgroups as part of a Model for Household Resiliency

# SOCIAL SERVICES FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

## USAID / HIGA UBEHO PROGRAM

Goal: Increase the use of health and related social support services among 72,000 of the most vulnerable households in Rwanda.

Donor: USAID/President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.




Life of Program: October 2009 – Present.

Coverage: 23 of 30 districts.



# Model for Resiliency



-  Reduce vulnerability to economic, social, health, and environmental shocks.
-  Savings mobilization, asset building, entrepreneurship, and enterprise development.
-  Linking people to networks of social, health, and education services.

Ubudehe 1& 2

Ubudehe 3

Ubudehe 4

Household Resiliency

Increase utilization of services among 72,000 of the most vulnerable households in Rwanda.

## Vulnerable households



Local Authorities

Rwandan Partner Org.

Volunteers

Education Support



Psychosocial Support

Life Skills Strengthening

Playgroups

Savings Groups



Farmer Field Schools



Nutrition Groups



Vocational Training

Enterprise Development

# Context and Rationale



# Context

## Rwanda

- Few ECD facilities
- Prohibitive costs
- Low enrollment in ECD

## 2011 Ministry of Education Launched the National ECD Policy and Strategic Plan

- Set goals for rapid expansion of ECD services
  - Nurturing environments for young children
  - Providing opportunities for play and early learning
  - Community participation – including parents and caregivers



# Rationale

Through ECD, children become more confident socially, and emotionally, develop higher verbal and intellectual capacities - setting the foundation for success in school, and supporting the broader human and economic development agenda.

# Rationale

## Cognitive

Early Learning & Language

## Physical

Healthy growth

## Social

Caring relationships

## Emotional

Feelings & temperament



Play is critical to a child's development and well-being.

# Playgroup Methodology



“For a child to develop and learn in a healthy and normal way, it is important to not only meet the basic needs for protection, food, and health care, but also to meet the basic need for interaction and stimulation, affection, security, and learning through exploration and discovery.”

Robert G. Myers (1992). The twelve who survive: Strengthening programmes of early childhood development in the third world.

# Playgroups in Rwanda



A playgroup is a weekly gathering for 1-2 hours that promotes the emotional and physical development of young children through structured and unstructured play. Volunteers run the playgroups and parents are encouraged to accompany their children.



# ECD through Playgroups

- Delivering age-appropriate services to children.
- Building supportive relationships.
- Fostering a sense of belonging.
- Enhancing parent/ caregiver knowledge and practices.



# Key Steps



Key: Global Communities Local Authorities External Evaluator  
 Local Civil Society Organizations Local Volunteers



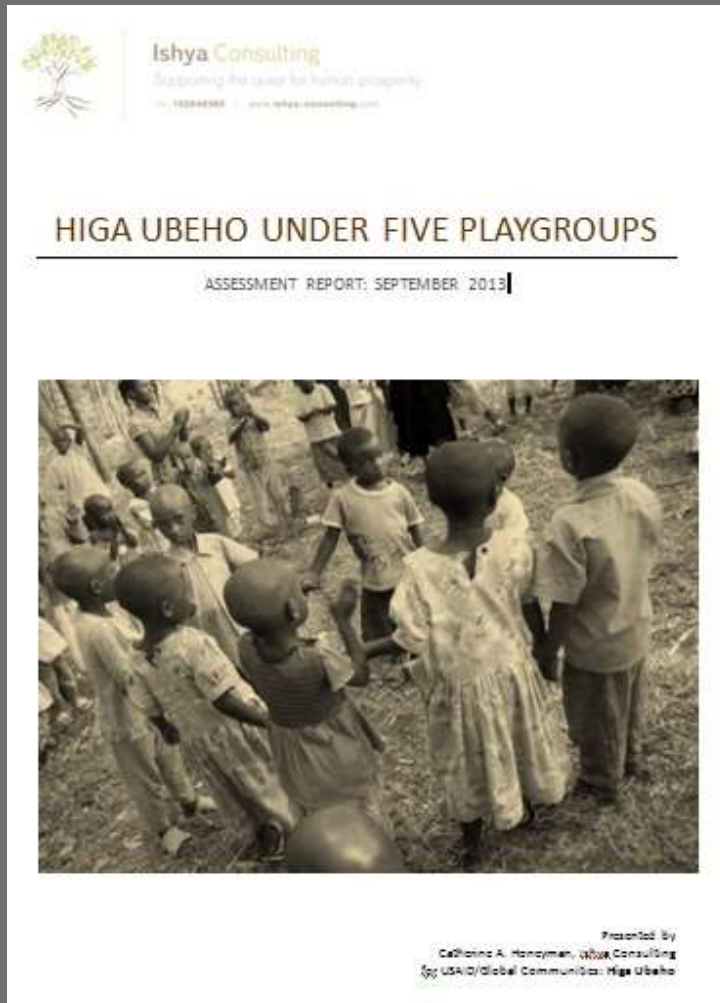
# Research Methods

Research Type:  
External Assessment


Period:  
September 2013

Sample:  
50% of established playgroups (N=15)  
Parents of participating children (N=148)  
Parents of non-participating children (N=125)

Methods:  
Interviews  
Observation  
Focus Groups  
Questionnaires



# Field Research Activities



QUESTIONNAIRES	SAMPLE
Questionnaires about children's life skills, administered to parents.	274
INTERVIEWS	
Interview with the Rwandan Partner Organizations.	13
Interview with the Village Chief.	15
Interview with the playgroup Volunteer(s).	26
Interview with the playgroup site host.	15
Interviews with Sector Education Officers (in selected Sectors).	7
OBSERVATION	
A detailed description of the playgroup site and surrounding context.	15
An observation of the playgroup in action & conversations with children.	13
An inventory of the toys available, condition, and use.	13
FOCUS GROUPS	
Focus groups with parents of children who participate in the playgroup.	150
Focus groups with parents of children who do not participate.	134

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- I. Life Skills
  - II. Inclusiveness
  - III. Quality
  - IV. Sustainability

## **DIMENSIONS OF THE ASSESSMENT**

# Index\* for Scoring Life Skills

## Physical Life Skills Index

- ① Hand washing (food)
- ② Hand washing (toilet)
- ③ Use of soap
- ④ Wearing shoes
- ⑤ Physically active

0-3 points  
0-3 points  
0-3 points  
0-3 points  
0-3 points

## Psychosocial Life Skills Index

- ① Happy disposition
- ② Interest in play/ others
- ③ Shares with others
- ④ Respectful and polite
- ⑤ Knows his/her rights

0-3 points  
0-3 points  
0-3 points  
0-3 points  
0-3 points

/ 30 POINTS

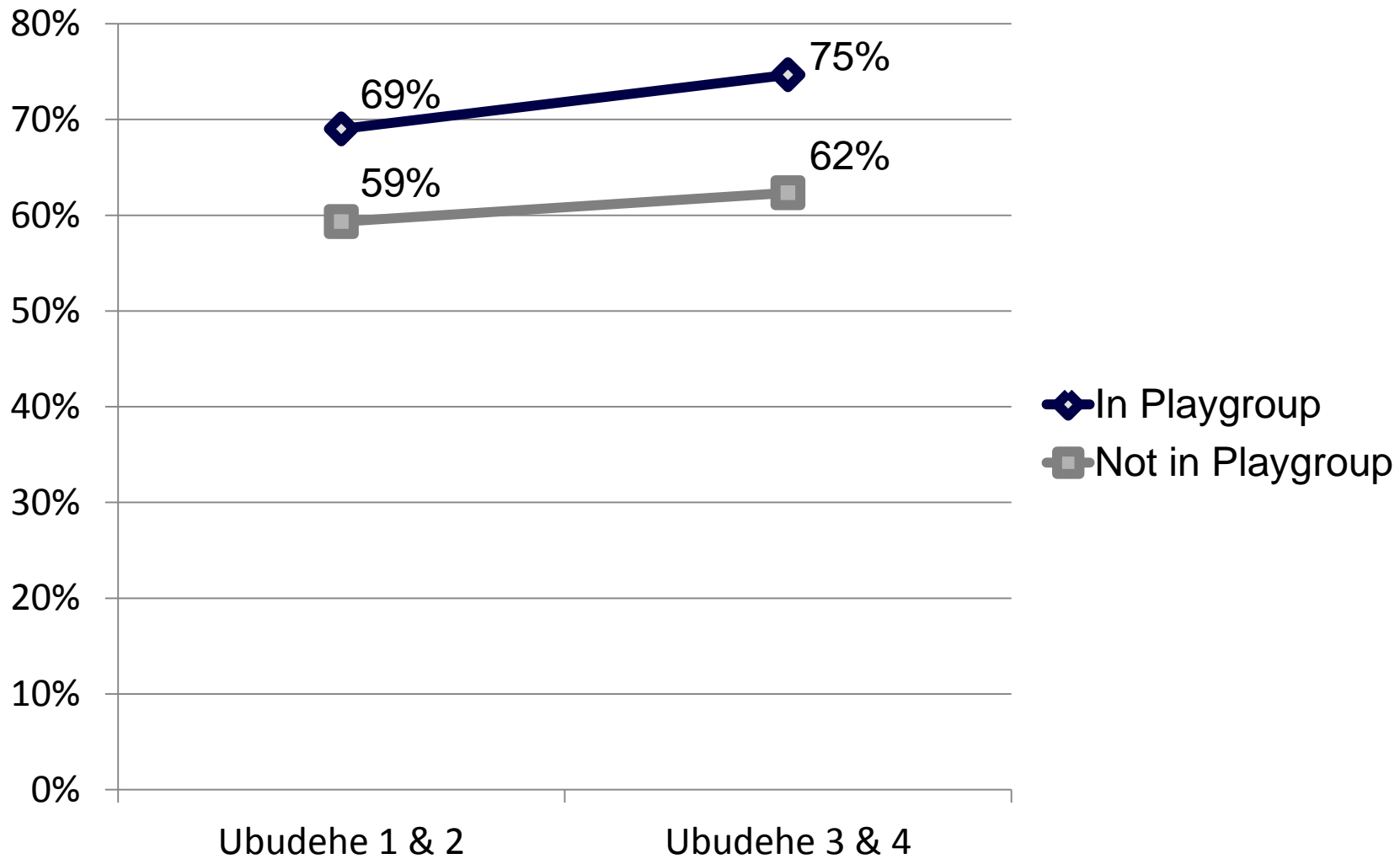
100%

# Key Findings

# Findings

## Psychosocial Life Skills Index Scores

Children not attending preschool (N=132)

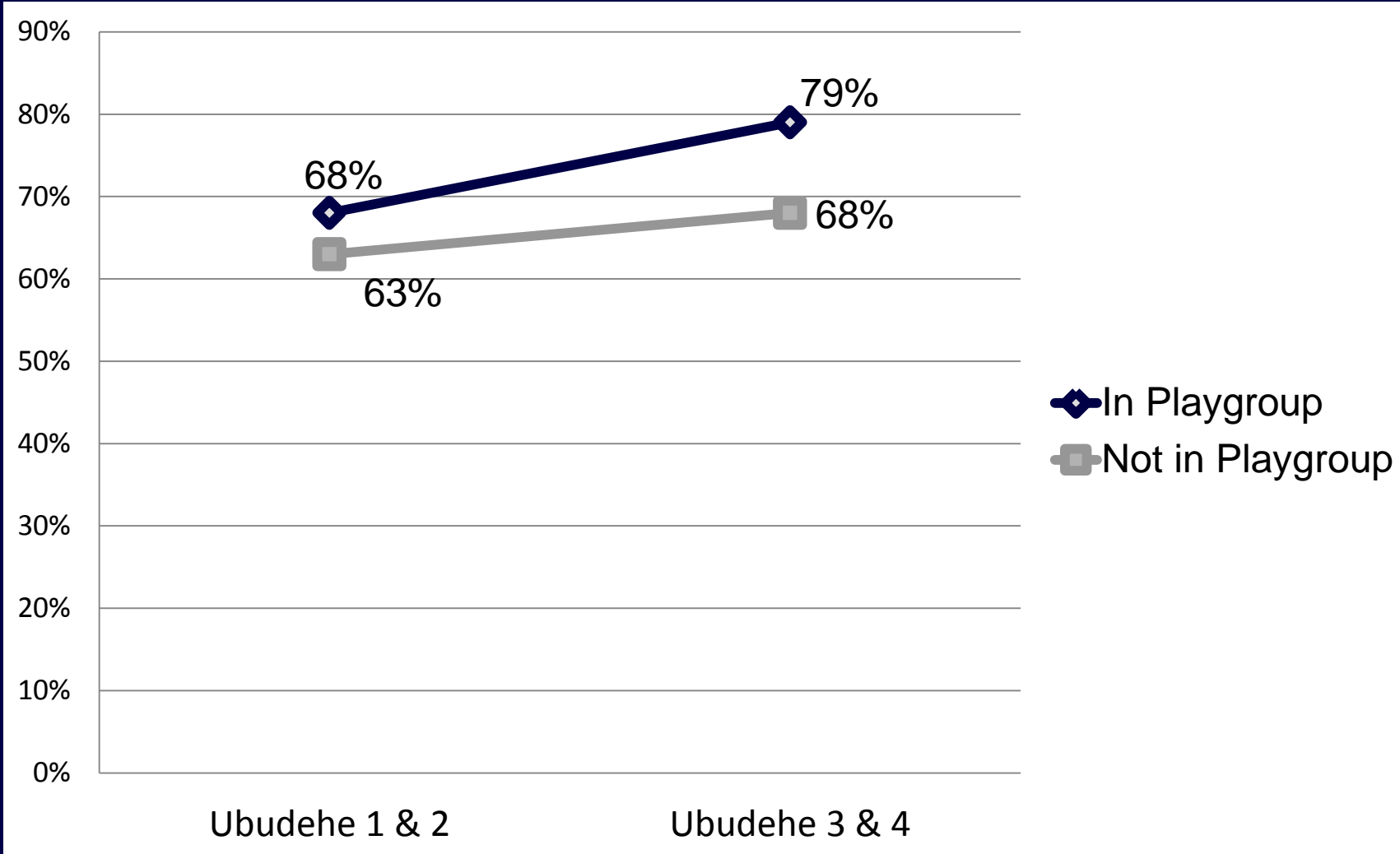




# Findings

## Physical Life Skills Index Scores

Children not attending preschool (N=132)



“Another thing you find among us is learning from each other.

...when you get here and see how other children are very clean and dressed in clean clothes, you try to make sure that your children come very smart the next week. It is like positive learning.”



“Playgroup participation increases the life skills scores of the most vulnerable children to approximately the same level as that of children from higher income households.”

When vulnerable children are present, playgroup volunteers integrate them effectively into all activities.

### Obstacles to Inclusion

“Orphans don’t participate in playgroups as they should because they stay with their grandparents who are weak and lack awareness about the playgroup.” Volunteer Interview

“I’m ashamed to send him without shoes or nice clothes. So I prefer to keep him home with me.” Parent Questionnaire



# Summary of Key Findings

## Strengths

Skilled & enthusiastic volunteers

Parents/teachers learn new ways to stimulate children

Integration of vulnerable children

Booster effect on life skills

## Weaknesses

Barriers to attendance

High children to volunteer ratio

Limited parental participation



- Continue to **explore/ test different playgroup models**  
– inclusion of vulnerable and children under age 3.
- Develop a strategy for transitioning **playgroup volunteers to paid employment.**
- Explore new **strategies for increasing parent participation.**
- **Promote and introduce new activities**; reduce the emphasis on toys.
- **Encourage and track referrals/links** with other services/ support.

- Incorporate a randomized controlled trial design, with a cost-effectiveness component into future programs that include playgroup interventions – to more systematically test their effect on life skills development.
- Include direct child observations in future research to better measure life skills.



Playgroups are an effective approach to increasing life skills of children under age-five. In addition, playgroups can be established with relatively few resources in places where most children cannot yet access pre-school.

## CONCLUSION



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